

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 497

CS 505 118

AUTHOR Petelle, John L.; Garthright-Petelle, Kathleen
TITLE Task Characteristics, Structural Characteristics, Organizational Relationships, and Communication Processes: A Contingency Approach to Job Performance. Phase III.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (35th, Honolulu, HI, May 23-27, 1985). For Phase II, see ED 249 554.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Research; Communication Skills; Group Structure; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Job Satisfaction; *Job Skills; Models; *Organizational Climate; *Organizational Communication; Performance Factors
IDENTIFIERS *Task Characteristics

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationships between (1) employee job performance and organizational relationships, (2) employee job performance and communication processes, (3) organizational relationships and communication processes, and (4) task characteristics and structural characteristics. Data were gathered from approximately 200 employees of a state service regulatory agency who worked in 28 different task units--groups working interdependently to accomplish a major task or produce a product. Survey instruments included measures of task uncertainty and interdependence; structural standardization, formalization, autonomy, and centralization; communication processes; and organizational relationships. Results showed that organizational relationships were positively correlated with performance, that there was no significant correlation between communication processes and job performance, that organizational relationships and communication processes were significantly correlated with each other, and that there was a significant negative correlation between task characteristics and structural characteristics. In addition, regression analysis revealed that organizational relationships and the structural variable of autonomy were significant predictors of performance. (FL)

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Task Characteristics, Structural Characteristics,
Organizational Relationships, and Communication Processes:
A Contingency Approach to Job Performance

Phase III

John L. Petelle
Department of Speech Communication
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0329

Kathleen Garthright-Petelle
Doane Lincoln College
Lincoln, Nebraska 68510

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a contingency model involving the factors of task characteristics, structural characteristics, organizational relationships, and communication processes and their respective components in regard to their relationships to job performance and their ability to predict job performance. Four hypotheses and two research questions were advanced. The factor of organizational relationships positively correlated with performance, including when task and structural characteristics were partialled out. There was no significant correlation between communication processes and employee job performance. This remained true when any influence of task and structural characteristics were partialled out. Organizational relationships and communication processes significantly correlated with each other, exerting some influence upon the relationship of the other to job performance. Data analysis revealed a significant but negative correlation between task characteristics and structural characteristics. A number of inter- and intrarelationshihs were found among the contingency factors, their subcomponents, and job performance. A regression model of analysis disclosed that organizational relationships and the structural variable of autonomy were significant predictors of performance.

Beginning with the work of Chester Barnard (1938), scholars have recognized the importance of communication to organizational functioning in general and to the management process in particular. The human relationship movement of the 1940s contributed significantly to the idea that communication should be a two-way process and that the quality of this process is instrumental in effecting satisfactory employee/organizational relationships. Although organizational communication research has not been lacking, there has been, in general, a failure to integrate the diverse research findings into a comprehensive theory regarding the structural characteristics of organizations, the organizational relationships that evolve in organizations, the activities evolved within this context, and the communication processes that occur as a result. As such, organizational communication researchers have called for a more comprehensive approach to the study of organization (Goldhaber, Dennis, Richetto, & Wiio, 1979; Grunig, 1975; Richetto, 1977). Similar concerns have also been registered from management and organizational design researchers (Fiedler, 1972; Luthans, 1973). This study attempts to respond to this call by taking a contingency approach to the study of organizational functioning. In commenting on some of the weaknesses in contingency theory in management, Tosi and Slocum (1984) have noted that, "We have been remarkably content to test narrow facets of the models...we need stronger theory. This may be accomplished by sharper definition of concepts and by broadening the scope of our theoretical inquiry" (p. 24). The authors also go on to note: "Common to all contingency approaches is the proposition that performance is a consequence of the fit between several factors: structure, people, technology, strategy, and culture" (p. 9). Although culture per se was not considered in this study, this study attempted to examine the relationships of structure, people, technology, (in the form tasks) and strategy (in the form of communication processes). Specifically, four major contingency factors are examined--structural characteristics, task characteristics, organizational relationships, and communication process--as they relate to employee job performance.

In the organizational environment, prolific research has focused on employee behavior in general and employee relationships in particular. Significant research areas have centered around such issues as motivation, job performance, job satisfaction, satisfaction with supervisors, overall satisfaction, feedback, task characteristics, and structural characteristics. From the organizational perspective, all of these are of concern, but the prime issue remains quality of employee job performance and the specific factors of relationships, tasks, structure, and communication processes.

In a comprehensive state-of-the-art paper, Jablin (1979) adds to the call of others regarding a more situational, contingency approach to the general study of organizational communication and, in particular, to the study of the superior-subordinate dyad. In response, researchers such as Bedeian, Mossholder, and Armenakis (1983); Caldwell and O'Reilly (1982); Falcione, McCrosky, and Daly (1977); Frost (1983); Griffin (1982); and Zahn and Wolf (1981) take such a direction, but concern in general has been associated with the influence of situational variables on satisfaction rather than employee job performance. We argue a similar approach to performance.

Although numerous studies have investigated factors affecting job performance (Ilgen & Knowlton, 1980; Ilgen, Mitchell, & Fredrickson, 1981; Matsui, Okada, & Inshita, 1983; Pulakos & Wexley, 1983), there is a general lack of effort in developing a more comprehensive, multidimensional contingency model.

Traditionally, organizational communication research has focused largely on the individual and small group perceptions and behavior. Inherent in such studies has been an emphasis upon organizational relationships (in particular relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and upper management) and certain communication processes that occur between and among these relationships (such as feedback to and from employee input, adequacy of shared information between

hierarchical levels, message accuracy, information overload and underload, timeliness of information). In contrast, organizational research has tended to focus on structural characteristics of organizations (such as standardization of work procedures, centralization of decision making, formalizations of rules in the nature of these tasks, and the degrees of dependence or interdependence of these tasks). It is clear that communication researchers and organizational researchers recognize the need for an integrated approach to the study of organizational functioning. It is also clear from the research literature that, in general, this need has not been addressed, particularly from a multidimensional comprehensive perspective. From a communication vantage point, we have focused on four general factors: Structural characteristic, task characteristic, organizational relationships, and the communication process involved in these activities. The following section further describes these four general factors and their respective subcomponents.

Task Characteristics

Fundamental to effective organizational functioning is the nature of the tasks which that organization performs (Leavitt, 1964). From the classic Ashton studies (Pugh, Hickson, Hinings, Macdonald, Turner, & Lupton, 1963) to the more recent work of Van De Ven and Delbecq (1974), the nature of a task may be classified in a number of ways. However, there is general agreement with respect to two major characteristics: uncertainty and interdependence (Blau, 1968; Galbraith, 1973; Hall, 1962; March & Simon, 1958; Steiner, 1972; Thompson, 1967; Van De Ven & Delbecq, 1974). Task uncertainty reflects the extent to which the task is unpredictable or has a high degree of change. Research in this respect clearly reveals three dimensions: variability, complexity, and evaluation specificity (Galbraith, 1973; Hall, 1962; Perrow, 1967; Pugh,

Hickson, & Hinings, 1969; Van de Ven and Delbecq, 1974). Clearly related to uncertainty is the idea of task interdependency which reflects the extent to which the task involves input from multiple persons or areas. Two dimensions of task interdependence have been suggested by previous research: the number of elements or activities required for task completion and the degree of flexibility in the combination of activities or elements (Steiner, 1972). The need for further research investigation with respect to the potential relationship of certain task characteristics to such variables as structure, organizational relationships, and particularly such communication processes as information flow has been noted by most of the previously mentioned researchers.

Structural Characteristics

In a modern sense, the significance of organization structure has been noted from Weber's (1947) concept of bureaucracy to the Aston studies (Pugh et al., 1963) to the more recent work of Hage and Aiken (1967), and Child (1972), and Reiman (1973). Structural characteristics are generally viewed from the perspective of how formalized, standardized, and centralized the organization is. The classic Aston studies suggest that the structural characteristics of formalization, standardization, and centralization are the most critical ones. Formalization refers to the extent to which rules and/or regulations are written. Standardization reflects the extent to which activities are standardized or legitimized by the organization. Centralization refers to the degree to which decisions are made at the top of the hierarchy. Implicit in the Ashton research was the issue of autonomy, the degree to which decision making within areas can be done independently. In varying degree, relationships between task characteristics and structural characteristics have been suggested by Woodward (1957), Perrow (1967), and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967).

Organizational Relationships

The significance of organizational relationships to organizational functioning has been examined by communication and organizational researchers too numerous to mention. In particular, the significance of organizational relationships on employee satisfaction and performance has been noted by Baird and Diebolt (1976); Bass, Valenzzi, Farrow, and Solomon (1975); Brown, (1964); Dansereau, Cashman, and Graen (1973); Dubin (1965); Fleishman and Harris (1962); Jablin (1979); Level and Johnson (1978); Schriesheim and Murphy (1976); Weed, Mitchell, and Moffit (1976). The scope of such studies, however, has not been as comprehensive as is warranted. Thus, our concern with organizational relationships focuses upon differing hierarchial levels as they might interface with task characteristics, structural characteristics, and communication processes. For purposes of this study, the level of data analysis concerns the employee's relationships with coworker, immediate supervisor, and upper management. The fact that organizations are run by people who engage in tasks and whose performance must be evaluated make the integration of this factor to the factors of tasks characteristic and structural characteristics a logical one.

Communication Processes

If, as Barnard (1938) has maintained, communication is at the very "heart" of the management process, and the essence of the management process is to integrate the efforts of various persons engaging in task activities within an organizational environment and then to evaluate these job performances, then an attempt to establish relationships between communication processes among and between these general factors of relationships, tasks and structure seems

warranted.

Communication processes may be viewed in a variety of ways, but in this study we are primarily concerned with more of an information-processing approach (much like the information-processing model offered by Penley, 1982). As such, communication process dimensions include information sent (Sent) and received (Received), action taken on information processed (Action), sources of information (Source), and quality of information (Quality). Implicit in these dimensions are concerns of information flow and communication networks.

Previous research has, to some extent, investigated the environment in which this flow occurs (relating to structure); the reason for such transmission (relating to tasks); the persons responsible for such information flow (relating to relationships); and the means by which such information flow occurs, i.e., relating to communication processes; and, in varying degrees, certain of the subcomponents in terms of their influence on job performance. Also previous research has suggested some relationships between these factors and subcomponents.

Kapp and Barnett (1983), for instance, have recently investigated the variables of organizational autonomy and environmental uncertainty as factors influencing boundary communication. Jablin (1982) finds that certain structural characteristics influence subordinates' perceptions of supervisory openness. Tushman (1978) looks at variations in work characteristics and observes that, as task uncertainty and complexity increase, a need for more information processing arises. Galbraith (1974) notes, "The greater the task uncertainty the greater the amount of information that must be processed during task execution in order to achieve a given level of performance" (p. 28). Herbert (1981) concurs with Galbraith, concluding, "As uncertainty increases, demands on organizational information processing increase" (p. 125). Park and Scott (1983) in

investigating the structural characteristics of autonomy claim that "variation in autonomy produced a negative effect on quantity of performance and no effect on quality of performance, though subjects in the more autonomous conditions reported a higher level of autonomy" (p. 203). Griffin (1982), on the other hand, finds that "task variety, autonomy, and feedback are positively and significantly correlated with productivity" (page 933).

In looking at employee perception of job characteristics as they might relate to organizational constraints, Walsh, Taber, and Beehr (1980) comment, "The effects of job characteristics on individual outcomes such as job satisfaction may be contingent upon the organization setting" (p. 252). Incorporating the dimension of satisfaction, Bhogot (1982) indicates, "In situations in which the individual's performance-related behaviors are relatively unrestricted by behavioral demands on the immediate work situation, changes in job performance are strongly and positively related to changes in job satisfaction" (p. 783).

It would seem, therefore, that certain communication processes (e.g., source or quality of information), as they occur between different organizational relationships (e.g., coworker), according to different structural characteristics (e.g., formalization), regarding different task characteristics (e.g., uncertainty), might very well have some significant interactions among themselves as well as significant influence on an employee's job performance. Lacking, however, is a comprehensive attempt to investigate these variables in a multidimensional contingency model with respect to their relationships to each other, to job performance, and to their potential as predictors of job performance.

While a contingency theory approach to organizational communication is not necessarily new, it has had, as Tosi and Slocum have noted (1984), its

limitations. At the same time, it is possible, given previous research, to posit some relationships among certain of these factors and their subcomponents with employee job performance. In doing so, it is necessary to overlook inconsistencies in previous research findings on the grounds that these inconsistencies reflect failures in the assessment and control of variables which influence those of primary concern.

As researchers, our critical task is the investigation of these factors and their subcomponents within a contingency framework. More specifically, their interrelationships and relationships with organizational performance are of major concern. Accordingly, and with some hesitation, the following relationships are suggested.

First, task characteristics, i.e., uncertainty and interdependence, should exhibit strong relationships with structural characteristics and communication processes. Further, the relationship between task characteristics and employee job performance may be mediated by these factors.

Second, communication processes and organizational relationships should be positively related and each should relate positively to employee job performance, independent of any task or structural characteristics. The strength of this relationship, i.e., between communication processes and organizational relationships and performance, may vary significantly under situations of varying task or structural characteristics.

Based upon the preceeding rationale, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between employee job performance and organizational relationships, independent of the task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between employee job performance and communication processes, independent of the task or structural

characteristics of the task unit.

H3: Organizational relationships and communication processes will be positively correlated.

H4: Task characteristics and their subcomponents will be significantly correlated with structural characteristics and their subcomponents.

At this phase of theory development, it is difficult to suggest other hypotheses. It is critical, however, to investigate interrelationships among the contingency factors and their subcomponents to provide data and insight for future research. Previous research findings and the contingency framework advanced in this article suggest two major research questions:

Research Question 1: What are the inter- and intrarelationships among the contingency factors (and their subcomponents) and employee job performance?

Research Question 2: Are the contingency factors of task characteristics structural characteristics, organizational relationships, and communication processes, or their subcomponents, significant predictors of employee job performance?

PROCEDURES

Sample

The population pool came from 28 task units of a state service-regulatory agency whose authority is dictated by the Legislature. This agency of approximately 214 employees performs a number of different functions including both interrelated tasks and independent tasks. The work force included management, technical, clerical, and nonmanagement professional personnel with the majority located at the central agency headquarters and approximately 60 members distributed throughout the state.

The agency director and division heads were asked to define task units

within their suborganizations for inclusion in the research. A task unit was defined as a group of people working interdependently to accomplish a major task or product which is a substantial portion of the group's daily responsibilities. Approximately twelve major divisions within the this task agency yielded 28 task units and involved approximately 189 participants.

Implementation of Task Characteristics

Task Uncertainty. The questionnaire items tapping task uncertainty were constructed from the Aston scales (Pugh et al., 1963; Pugh, Hickson, & Hinings, 1969) around the three dimensions of task uncertainty noted in the previous review of literature: (1) variability, (2) complexity, and (3) number of elements or activities in the search process. Three of the scales reflect the three dimensions of task uncertainty: specificity of criteria of quality evaluation, multiplicity of outputs, and customer orientation. These scales were incorporated into the survey questionnaire of task uncertainty. The point-value range (1-4) were altered to make the items suitable for use with 7-point scale items.

To collect data on all three dimensions of task uncertainty it was necessary to supplement the Aston scales with the following items presented on a 7-point scale: the number of activities involved in the accomplishment of the task; the number of exceptions encountered in the task; the level of complexity of the task; and the extent to which the nature of the task or task activities change.

Task Interdependence. Task interdependence was measured through the use of a 6-item scale reflecting the following dimensions of task interdependence: (1) number of elements or activities, and (2) amount of flexibility in element or activity combination.

Task uncertainty and task interdependence scores were added to achieve an overall score for each task unit. This task characteristic was reflective of high uncertainty and interdependence.

Implementation of Structural Variables

Standardization, formalization, autonomy, and centralization were also measured at the task unit level through a questionnaire given to supervisors. At this point, however, several problems arose with the use of the Aston measure of these structural variables. First, the Aston scales are designed to tap the structural characteristics of organizations and are, accordingly, global in nature. Second, the task units in the current study are members of a large state agency and have, at a minimum, identical state rules and regulations providing similar standardization and formalization. For these reasons, it is imperative that the structural measure be sensitive to task unit rather than agency-level data with respect to these variables. Finally, the language employed by the Aston items was judged to be unfamiliar to the population used for this research. For these reasons, a modification of the Aston scales was developed into a survey questionnaire. The specific implementation of each structural variable is described here.

Standardization. Standardization was measured through the use of an 11-item, 7-point scale, which measured the extent to which rules and procedures existed for various activities. The measure of standardization reflected the extent to which activities were legitimized by the organization, rather than left to the discretion of the employee.

Formalization. Formalization was measured through the use of 5-item, 7-point scale. Formalization reflected the extent to which rules and regulations were written.

Autonomy. The questionnaire used an adapted Aston autonomy measure.

Autonomy was measured at the task-unit level by asking supervisors to indicate the decision they could make, even if others subsequently confirmed the decision.

Centralization. Centralization information was collected from three levels of organization--department, division, and task unit. Supervisors indicated the extent to which the unit was centralized or to whether decisions were made at the top.

Implementation of Communication Processes and Relationships

The ICA survey questionnaire was used to collect data with respect to communication processes and organizational relationships. This information was collected at the employee and supervisory levels. Supervisors were not considered as a part of the work group they supervised, but as members of the group in which they worked.

Communication processes, a composite variable, included the following dimensions: information received, information sent, quality of information, amount of action taken from information sent, and amount of information from various sources.

Organizational relationships were measured at three levels: with coworker, with supervisor, and with upper management. The overall relationship variable also included a component which reflected the level of participation that employees felt they had in the work place.

Implementation of Performance

Employee-level performance was measured through the use of performance evaluations and aggregated to reflect the performance of the work group. As such, this variable was unobtrusively collected from personnel records. The following dimensions of performance were included: productivity, work habits, attitude, dependability, initiative, use of time, accuracy, ability to take

instructions, job knowledge, communication, interest in work, observing rules and regulations, interest in additional training, and cooperation. Each of the items was measured on a 10-point rating scale.

ANALYSIS

Two strategies were employed in the analysis of the hypotheses and research questions. Pearson Product Moment correlations were employed to identify simple relationships between the contingency factors and their subcomponents and job performance. Subsequently, partial correlations were used to control for the influence of these factors and their subcomponents. The alpha level was a priority set at .05. Data with respect to research question four were analyzed through a Multiple Regression Procedure; the alpha level was set at .05.

RESULTS

H1: There will be a significant, positive relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance, independent of the task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

Results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation procedure revealed a significant, positive correlation between organization relationships and employee job performance ($r=.52$, $n=28$, $p<.05$). Both task and structural characteristics were partialled out, but this process did not influence the relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance (see Table 1). Accordingly, the first hypothesis was confirmed by the data analysis, i.e., (there was a strong positive relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance independent of task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

H2: There will be a significant, positive relationship between communication processes and employee job performance, independent of the task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

Results of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation procedure revealed no

significant, correlation between communication processes and employee job performance ($r=.20$, $n=28$, $p>.05$). Both task and structural characteristics were partialled out, but this process did not influence the relationship between communication processes and employee job performance (see Table 2). Accordingly, the second hypothesis was not confirmed by the data analysis.

H3: Organizational relationships and communication processes will be positively correlated.

Results of the data analysis revealed support for the third hypothesis; organizational relationships and communication processes were significantly, positively correlated ($r=.75$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 3). As noted in Tables 1 and 2, each of these two variables also influenced the relationship of the other to employee job performances; this issue will be addressed in the discussion section.

H 4: Task characteristics and their subcomponents will be significantly correlated with structural characteristics and their subcomponents.

Results of the data analysis with respect to hypothesis four revealed a significant, negative correlation between the contingency factors of task characteristics and structural characteristics ($r=-.64$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 3). Analysis of the interrelationships between the subcomponents of these contingency factors revealed that the task subcomponent of uncertainty significantly but negatively correlated with the subcomponents of standardization ($r= -.60$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and formalization ($r= -.63$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) for structural characteristics. The task component of interdependence also significantly correlated with the subcomponents of structural characteristics, standardization ($r=.34$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and formalization ($r=.38$, $n=28$, $p<.05$), but in a positive direction (Table 4).

Research Question 1: What are the inter- and intrarelationshps among the

contingency factors, their subcomponents, and employee job performance?

The results of this analysis produced a somewhat complex array of relationships. Among these four contingency factors, the results indicate that one--organizational relationships--clearly emerged as significantly correlating with employee job performance ($r=.52$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 5). In particular, the subcomponents of supervisor ($r=.39$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and upper management ($r=.31$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) most strongly influenced this overall contingency outcome. Although somewhat directional, the subcomponent of coworker ($r=.21$, $n=28$, $p>.05$) was not significant (see Table 5).

With respect to task characteristics, neither uncertainty ($r=.06$, $p>.05$) nor interdependence ($r=.23$, $n=23$, $p>.05$) significantly related to job performance (see Table 5). In the case of structural characteristics, autonomy proved to be significantly correlated to performance ($r=.38$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 5). The remaining three subcomponents, formalization ($r=.03$, $n=28$, $p>.05$), standardization ($r= -.20$, $n=28$, $p>.05$), and centralization ($r=.01$, $n=28$, $p>.05$) (see Table 5) did not. As previously indicated, two of the three subcomponents or organizational relationships were found to relate significantly to performance--supervisor ($r=.39$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and upper management ($r=.31$, $n=28$, $p<.05$)--and, while not significant, the subcomponent of coworker was directional ($r=.21$, $n=28$, $p>.05$) (see Table 5). With respect to communication processes, quality of information processed significantly correlated with performance ($r=.33$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and action taken on processed information came very close to achieving significance ($r=.30$, $n=28$, $p>.05$); the remaining subcomponents of information received ($r= -.23$, $n=28$, $p>.05$), information sent ($r=.25$, $p>.05$), and source of information $r=.08$, $p>.05$) were not significantly correlated with job performance (see Table 5).

The structural characteristics' subcomponent of formalization also significantly correlated with the organizational relationships subcomponent of

coworker ($r=.35$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 4). The structural characteristics' subcomponent of autonomy correlated with the task variable of interdependence ($r=.44$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and the communication process variable of information received ($r= -.35$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 4). The structural component variable of centralization also significantly correlated with information received ($r= -.44$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 4). The organizational relationship variable of coworker, supervisor, and upper management all significantly correlated with the communication processes' variables of information sent ($r=.39$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; $r=.36$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; and $r=.60$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) and action taken on information ($r=.45$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; $r=.47$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; and $r=.55$, $n=28$, $p<.05$). In addition, the relationship variables of coworkers and upper management also correlated with the communication process variables of source and quality of information ($r=.54$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; $r=.35$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; $r=.34$, $n=28$, $p<.05$; $r=.41$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 6).

Research Question 2: Are the four contingency factors of task characteristics, structural characteristics, organizational relationships, and communication processes, or their subcomponents, significant predictors of employee job performance?

These four contingency factors were cast into a regression model for the prediction of job performance. Because the contingency factors of task characteristics and structure were not found to be correlated with performance, subcomponents of these factors were used in the multiple regression model together with the factors of organizational relationships and communication processes. Accordingly, the following predictors were cast into the model: uncertainty, interdependence, standardization, formalization, centralization, autonomy, organizational relationships, and communication processes.

Owing to the problems associated with the use of multiple predictors in

situations with a small number of cases, only the first two significant predictors were examined. As expected from the analysis of the previous research questions, organizational relationships was the most significant predictor of task-unit performance ($r=.52$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 7). Autonomy was the second significant predictor of performance (multiple $r=.62$, $n=28$, $p<.05$). After organizational relationships, the structural variable of autonomy contributed more to the prediction of performance than either task characteristics, communication processes, or other structural variables.

DISCUSSION

H1: There will be a strong positive relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance, independent of the task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

As previously noted, an abundance of research has focused on the influence of organizational relationships on employee satisfaction and performance (Baird & Diebot, 1976; Bass, Valenzi, Farrow & Slocum, 1975; Brown, 1964; Dansereau, Cashman, & Graen, 1973; Dubin, 1965; Fleishman & Harris, 1962; Jablin, 1979; Level & Johnson, 1978; Schriesheim & Murphy, 1976; Weed, Mitchell & Moffit, 1976; Wheelless, Wheelless, & Howard, 1984). While the influence of immediate supervisor on performance is certainly understandable, the effect of upper management in this study is somewhat more difficult to explain. Much of this may result from the nature of this state organizational hierarchy. In the state agency used in this research, the director of the department was appointed by and reported directly to the governor. Nevertheless, hiring, staffing, and other personnel decisions were heavily influenced by the state personnel department. Because of this, upper management authority was more relevant for some organizational decisions than others and was not substantially different

from supervisor authority for the same. Clearly there were some issues for which upper management was relatively powerless.

A second feature of interest is the difference in hierarchial level among supervisors reporting directly to the director of the department. These levels vary from the deputy director to the administrative assistant. Accordingly, the task units studied in this research vary considerably with respect to function and position in the departmental hierarchy.

Relationship with coworker, although correlating positively with performance, is not statistically significant. Given that the structural characteristic of formalization is the only significant correlation with coworker could again suggest something about the uniqueness of this organizational heirarchy.

Another explanation for this finding may be the relationship between interdependence and the importance of coworker relationship on performance. Interdependence was positively ($r=.23$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) although not significantly correlated with performance (see Table 5). A similar relationship was found between coworker and task interdependence ($r=.21$, $n=28$, $p>.05$) (see Table 4). These relationships may be indicative of the situations in which coworker relationships have an impact upon importance, i.e., when the nature of the task is interdependent, coworker relationships are more important than when the situation requires less dependence upon others. This interpretation is not tested by the analysis, but seems reasonable, particularly in light of the failure to find any similar relationship between supervisor or upper management relationship and interdependence (see Table 3). Future research should determine the strength of the relationship between interdependence and the relative importance of coworker relationships on job performance.

As noted previously, partial correlation analysis was performed to control for the influence of task, structure, and communication processes on the

relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance. At the factor level, only communication processes biased the observed relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance; this relationship increased to $r=.57$, $df=25$, $p<.05$) when communication processes were partialled out (Table 1).

One can only conclude that the information exchange process between employees, supervisors, and upper management is viewed in a very positive manner and is an important factor in contributing to these organizational relationships and employee job performance. Simultaneously, in the coworker relationship none of the subcomponents of communication process were significant and only sum of information received approached significance. Obviously, in this organization, the process of information exchange is not an important factor in the coworker relationship.

More specifically, at the subcomponent level, little change in the relationship was observed using first-order partial correlations (see Table 8); more substantial changes were observed under second- and third-order partial correlation analysis. Using second-order partials, the relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance was substantively improved when information received and standardization were partialled out ($r=.62$, $df=24$, $p<.05$) and when information received and information from key sources were partialled out.

Advancing to third-order partials contributed little to understanding the relationship between organizational relationships and employee job performance, with the exception of highlighting the emergence of the task characteristic of uncertainty. The highest relationship between organizational relationships and job performance was observed when task uncertainty, information received, and information from key sources were partialled out ($r=.65$, $df=23$, $p<.05$) (see

Table 8).

In light of the simple correlations between these variables, these results are not surprising. Although no relationship was observed between uncertainty and performance, there was a negative (but not significant) relationship between uncertainty and organizational relationships. Clearly the negative relationship between uncertainty and organizational relationships reduced the observed correlation coefficient between organizational relationships and employee job performance.

It seems clear that organizational relationships are critical to employee job performance, independent of any other task or structural characteristic or communication process. The strength of this relationship may be slightly obscured by other contingency factors, or their subcomponents, but its overall influence is more powerful than any other factor.

H2: There will be a significant, positive relationship between communication processes and employee job performance, independent of the task or structural characteristics of the task unit.

Results of the data analysis revealed no support for the second hypothesis; communication processes were not significantly related to employee job performance ($r=.20$, $n=28$, $p>.05$) (see Table 2). This relationship was not influenced when the task or structural characteristics were partialled out.

One explanation for these findings lies within the communication processes factor itself. Five subcomponents comprised the communication processes factor, information received, sent, quality of information, action taken on information, and source of information. These subcomponents were not strongly intercorrelated, clearly making communication process a multidimensional factor (see Table 9).

Accordingly, the subcomponents had varying relationships with employee job

performance (see Table 5). Only one factor, quality of information achieved significance ($r=.33$, $n=28$, $p<.05$). Amount of information received was negatively correlated with employee job performance ($r= -.23$, $n=28$, $p>.05$), although this relationship failed to achieve significance. Perhaps information received may be a symptom of poor job performance, i.e., supervisor and upper management's efforts to deal with poor performance. Some support for this interpretation is received by examining the relationship between communication processes and organizational relationships which, in general, are strongly correlated. Of all the relationships between the subcomponents of these two factors, only information received is clearly unrelated to organizational relationships (see Table 6).

H3: Organizational relationship and communication processes will be positively correlated.

Organizational relationships correlated significantly with communication processes ($r=.75$, $n=28$, $p<.05$) (see Table 3). The significant correlation between organizational relationship and communication processes is not surprising, considering the very basis of such relationships involves the sending and receiving of information concerning job requirements, job performance, management practices and policy, and so on. This correlation probably also reflects the positive (but nonsignificant) relationship between communication processes and performance.

Given previous research concerning information exchange (i.e., amount, nature, and mode) between and among certain organizational relationships, i.e., Baird and Diebolt (1976); Lawler, Porter, and Tenenbaum (1968), Penfield (1974), Read (1962), Redding (1972), it is certainly no surprise to find the positive and highly significant correlations between the factors of organizational relationship and communication processes. The influence of upper management continued to prevail, for it had a significantly positive correlation with every

communication subcomponent except information received. Overall, it appears that employees with good upper management relationships tend to be more satisfied with their interaction, with the exception of information received. Although this study does not examine the specific scale items of this subcomponent, future research should investigate this with respect to the issues in which information received is unrelated to the quality of the person's relationship with upper management.

As the post hoc analysis clearly reveals, the relationship with coworker assumes more importance with respect to communication processes than it does with performance. As in the case of upper management, coworkers correlates positively with every subcomponent of communication processes except information received. Interestingly, the supervisor relationship and communication processes in general show much less relationship than with performance. Two subcomponents of communication processes do significantly correlate with supervisor relationship: information sent and action taken on information sent. Employees with good supervisor relationships feel that they are sending sufficient information and that appropriate action is being taken on it. On the other hand, the amount of information employees receive and such aspects as its timeliness, excessiveness, accuracy, and usefulness are unrelated to the quality of relationship with the supervisor.

In terms of job performance, then, it appears that the relationship dimension of the supervisor-subordinate dyad, in this case, is more important to job performance than is the overall communication process involved in supervisor-subordinate interaction. For this particular agency, future research should also focus more specifically on the message content of supervisor-subordinate interactions. This would help to establish clearer links between employees' relationships with upper management and supervisors and the

communication issues most related to the quality of these relationships. The data indicate that, to some extent, relationships with supervisors in particular are unaffected by the quality of information received from various sources. Individual item analysis would be most helpful to understand the specific issues for which the employee may hold his/her supervisor accountable, i.e., those issues in which communication would be related to supervisor relationship.

H4: Task characteristics and its subcomponents will be significantly correlated with structural characteristics and its subcomponents.

Results of the data analysis revealed a significant, negative correlation between task characteristics and structural characteristics ($r = -.64$, $n = 23$, $p < .05$) (see Table 3). Analysis of the subcomponents offers a reasonable explanation for the negative correlation between task characteristics and structural characteristics. The highly significant negative correlation between the task subcomponent of uncertainty and the structural subcomponents of formalization and standardization no doubt is reflecting that, as organizations become more standardized and formalized, the level of uncertainty in the tasks performed by employees decreases. At the same time, the much lower but still significant, positive correlations between the task subcomponent of interdependence and the structural subcomponents of standardization and formalization indicate that formalizing and standardizing task activities also lead to greater task interdependence. The relatively strong and positive association between the task characteristics of interdependence and the structural characteristic of autonomy is difficult to interpret. One would expect to find that the more interdependent the task, the less the work-unit autonomy. Again, this finding may be related to the manner in which autonomy is assessed. Clearly, the supervisor's freedom to make decisions is not necessarily related to the employee's perception of autonomy; the issue was discussed previously.

It is also possible that supervisors of highly interdependent task units may have been given more autonomy, due to their capacity to rely on structural control and/or their position within the hierarchy. Again, in this state department, supervisors at higher organizational levels may have perceived more autonomy. The correlation between centralization and autonomy seems to support this interpretation.

Research Question #1: What are the inter- and intrarerelationships among the contingency factors plus their subcomponents, and employee job performance?

As previously discussed, the organizational relationships subcomponent of supervisor and upper management significantly correlates with employee performance. The only other factor subcomponent to correlate significantly is autonomy. This finding adds more confusion to the results of the Fark and Scott (1983) and Griffin (1982) studies regarding autonomy and job performance. The notion of autonomy may be a task-unit level perception, and, in general, may be somewhat unique to a specific organizational heirarchy.

In this study, autonomy was measured at the task-unit level by asking supervisors to indicate the decisions they could make even though others subsequently had to confirm the decision. As the supervisor's perception of autonomy was not related to any employee perception, it may not have been an accurate perception of task-unit autonomy.

In the Fark and Scott study, employees reported a higher level of autonomy, i.e., the employee perception coincided with the measure of autonomy used by the researchers. In this case, although supervisors perceive their own autonomy as high, they may or may not have passed that decision-making freedom to their subordinates. Regardless, subordinates may or may not have perceived this phenomenon accurately. Future research should continue to explore the impact of autonomy and perception of this factor at both the task-unit level and

supervisor level.

Another clear finding of this research is the relationship between structural elements and task characteristics. The influence of task uncertainty and interdependence clearly are as suggested by previous research (Blau, 1968; Galbraith, 1973; Hall, 1962; March & Simon, 1958; Steiner, 1972; Thompson, 1967; Van de Ven & Delbecq, 1974). It appears that the use of structural mechanisms such as standardization is positively correlated with interdependence and negatively with uncertainty. Under uncertain conditions, it would be difficult to use structural mechanisms for organizational control. In contrast, highly interdependent task units would find structural mechanisms useful for low-level organizational control.

Interaction effects are not possible to determine with the analytical methods used in this research. Future research should examine the interaction between uncertainty and interdependence and should allow more precise explanations of the role of structural mechanisms and communication processes in promoting employee job performance.

Research Question 2: Are the contingency factors of task characteristics, structural characteristics, organizational relationships, and communication processes, or their subcomponents, significant predictors of job performance?

The analysis of this question clearly shows that organizational relationships are the most significant factor in the prediction of job performance at the task-unit level. This prediction is improved through consideration of the autonomy of the work group: the more autonomous the task unit and the more positive the relationships within that task unit, the higher the work-group performance.

These findings encourage an examination of the specific relationships which make a difference in work-group performance. Accordingly, the overall relationship factor is broken down between coworkers, supervisor, and upper

management (this procedure also results in a fourth variable, which appears to reflect overall participation in this unit). Results of a post hoc multiple regression reveal that among the components of overall organization relationship, relationship with supervisor is the most significant predictor of task unit performance ($r=.39$, $n=28$, $p<.05$). Autonomy continues to emerge as the second most significant predictor. Although interesting, it is important to note that overall relationship is a better predictor of job performance than the specific relationship, i.e., supervisor.

SUMMARY

Organizational relationships as a factor significantly correlated with performances independent of the influence of any other factor. The two particular organizational relationships that emerge are supervisor and upper management. One must note that the organizational relationship of coworker never emerges in the matrix as being either a positively or negatively significant correlation. One should also note that in looking at the overall partial correlation between performance and the four major factors (communication process, task characteristics, organizational relationships, and structural characteristics) when communication processes are controlled, the relationship between performance and organizational relationships and particularly the relationship of supervisor is significantly positive. The relationship with upper management approaches significant at .058. At the same time, when organizational relationships are controlled, the relationship between performance and communication processes is negative. Given the significance of the supervisor relationship and the constant positive emergence of the positive

relationship with upper management, one can only conclude that, in this particular organizational environment, relationships with coworkers were either relatively irrelevant or actually detrimental in nature.

It would also appear, when one considers the global factors of organizational relationships, task characteristics, communication processes, and structural characteristics, that two variables emerge as being most significant with respect to performance. First, the relationship with immediate supervisor and the autonomy of the task unit itself; second, the quality of information, as this is mediated not only by the immediate supervisor but also by upper management. Furthermore, the task characteristics of uncertainty and interdependence and the structural characteristics of formalization, standardization, and centralization (with exception of autonomy) appear to have relatively little effect on the outcome of performance. These results may be attributed to the uniqueness of this particular organization and the way in which it is structurally organized. The results may also suggest unique differences between performances and the factors of communication, task, relationship, and structure and public and private enterprise. It may very well be that the findings of this study are more germane to the public sector of organizations than to the private sector. Future research should investigate such differences.

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TABLE 1

Correlations Between Organizational Relationships
and Employee Job Performance

Correlation Procedure	R		Controlling Variables Relationships
Product Moment	.52*	n=28	No Control Variable
Partial Correlation	.52*	df=25	Task
Partial Correlation	.52*	df=25	Structure
Partial Correlation	.57*	df=25	Communication Processes

*P<.05

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Communication Processes
and Employee Job Performance

Correlation Procedure	R		Controlling Variables Relationships
Product Moment	.20	n=28	No Control Variable
Partial Correlation	.20	df=25	Task
Partial Correlation	.20	df=25	Structure
Partial Correlation	-.33*	df=25	Organizational Relationships

*P<.05

TABLE 3

Correlations Between Task Characteristics, Structural Characteristics,
Organizational Relationships, and Communication Processes

	Task Characteristics	Structural Characteristics	Communication Processes
Structure	-.64	1.00	.03
Relationships	.05	.08	.75*
Communication	.00	-.03	1.00

N = 28

*p < .05

TABLE 4
Correlations Between Task, Structure,
Organization, and Communication Variables

	<u>Task</u>		<u>Structure</u>			
	UNCER	INTER	STAND	FORMAL	AUTON	CENTR
TASK	.31*	-.55*	-.66*	.65*	-.06	-.24
INTER	-.11	1.00	.34*	.38*	.44*	.21
STRUC	-.39*	.55*	.81*	.69*	.42*	.56*
STAND	-.60*	.34*	1.00	.72*	-.14	.23
FORMAL	-.63*	.38*	.72*	1.00	-.04	.00
AUTON	.17	.44*	-.14	-.04	1.00	.37*
CENTR	.26	.22	.23	.00	.37*	1.00
RELAT	-.12	.13	.04	.07	.08	-.02
COWORK	-.26	.21	.28	.35*	.07	-.30
SUPER	-.16	.14	.22	-.10	.02	-.27
UPPMGMT	-.12	.07	.11	.07	-.05	.09
COMM	-.03	.04	.09	.17	-.06	-.15
RECEIVED	.19	-.28	-.25	-.25	-.35*	-.44*
SENT	-.28	-.15	.04	.26	.00	-.11
QUALITY	-.07	.15	.27	.23	.11	.11
ACTION	.01	.09	.16	.17	.12	.11
SOURCE	-.07	.11	.08	.30	.05	-.05

N=28

*P<.05

TABLE 5

Correlations Between Job Performance and
Components of Task Characteristics, Structural Characteristics,
Organizational Relationships, and Communication Processes

<u>Contingency Variables</u>	<u>Performance</u>
Task	.19
Uncertainty	.06
Interdependence	.23
Structure	.04
Formalization	.03
Standardization	-.20
Centralization	.01
Autonomy	.38*
Communication Processes	.20
Quality	.33*
Action	.30
Received	-.23
Sent	.25
Source	.08
Organizational Relationships	.52*
Coworker	.21
Supervisor	.39*
Upper Management	.31*

N = 28

*p < .05

TABLE 6

Correlations Between Subcomponents of
Organizational Relationships and Communication Processes

Organizational Relationships	RECEIVED	SENT	ACTION	SOURCE	QUALITY
Coworker	.17	.39*	.45*	.54*	.35*
Supervisor	.06	.36*	.47*	.12	.21
Upper Management	.10	.60*	.55*	.34*	.41*

N = 28

*p < .05

TABLE 7

Task Characteristics, Structural Characteristics,
Organizational Relationships, and Communication Processes
As Predictors of Job Performance

Predictor	Multiple R	R Squared	SEE ^a
Relationships	.52*	.27	56.8
Autonomy	.62*	.38	53.3

N = 28

*p < .05

^aSEE, Standard Error of the Estimate

TABLE 8
Correlation Analysis of Employee Job Performance
and Organizational Relationships

Correlation Procedure	Coefficient		Controlling for
Pearson Product Moment	.52*	n=28	No Control
1st Order Partial	.54*	df=25	Standardization
2nd Order Partial	.62*	df=24	Standardization/ information Received
	.62*	df=24	Information Received and Source of Information
3rd Order Partial	.62*	df=23	Uncertainty, Standard- Information Received
	.63*	df=23	Uncertainty, Centralization Information Received
	.65*	df=23	Uncertainty, Information Received, Source of Information

*p < .05